

Promoting Innovations for Sustainable ——Biodiversity Management in Agricultural Systems*

Motyuki Suzuki

(Vice Rector, Environment and Sustainable Development United Nations University, Kunming, Yunnan Province, China)

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honor for me to welcome delegates to participate in “Workshop on Agrobiodiversity Conservation in Southwest China”, the national meeting of China Cluster of the United Nations University Project on People, Land Management and Environmental Change (PLEC).

The United Nations University (UNU) is an international community of scholars engaged in research, postgraduate training and knowledge dissemination on the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare that are concerns of the United Nations, its peoples and member states. UNU works through a global network of its own research and training centers and programmes, its place and of associated and collaborating institutions and scholars, and promotes innovations, sharing and collaboration across different regions, culture, disciplines, professionals and practitioners.

The PLEC project exemplify well the UNU mode of operation. As the major user of natural resources, agriculture (including forestry) contain most biodiversity (especially agrobiodiversity), and also the most important livelihood of the poor in the world. In order to alleviate poverty on a sustainable basis, we must not damage natural resources the poor depend on for their livelihood. It is therefore essential to develop and promote the best practices that meet both objectives of rural development and nature conservation. Building upon local expertise of resources management, PLEC brings together the insights of best, but widely dispersed farmers and scientists for generating innovative approaches to biodiversity management and agriculture. It is organized and carried out through an international network of locally based cluster in 12 developing countries in Africa, tropical Americas and Asia – Pacific regions. PLEC network is now composed of more than 200 professionals (scientists, researchers, and officials) and 80 junior researchers (and students) in 40 institutions, and more than 600 collaborating farmers and 100 expert farmers in 27 demonstration sites, located in participating countries. The principal scientific coordinator, Prof. Brookfield will talk more about the origin, method and purpose of PLEC later on.

PLEC work in Yunnan, China is one of the important parts in the global PLEC network. As a “Kingdom of Fauna and Flora”, Yunnan is very rich in biodiversity and natural resources and home to 25 ethnic minority groups in China. However, Yunnan is still economically poor compared with other provinces in China. The per capita net income of rural households in Yunnan is only the second from the bottom in China. Cultivating biodiversity has been identified as an important strategy for economic development in Yunnan. PLEC findings on biodiversity management and agriculture would be relevant to this strategy.

China Cluster of PLEC is one of earliest groups in the PLEC network. A year after the PLEC was initiated in 1992, a small group of Chinese researchers in Yunnan at the Kunming Institute of Botany and in other institutes jointed PLEC. Early work was mainly in Xishuangbanna. The same group of researchers successfully ob-

* Address at GEF/UNEP/UNU – PLEC China National Meeting and Workshop on Agrobiodiversity Conservation in Southwest China; Kunming, Yunnan, China, 20 – 21 January, 2002

tained the funding from the MacArthur Foundation for a project on the management of farm and forest land in the buffer zone of the Gaoligongshan National Nature Reserve. In 1998, when PLEC gained substantial funding from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the Xishuangbanna and Gaoligongshan work were brought together as the programme of China Cluster. Much of the PLEC work has been done within this enlarged project. Through UNU, the GEF funding of more than \$ 600 000 has been provided to PLEC – China since 1998. Given importance and size of the work in Yunnan, the funding to China Cluster is one of the largest among PLEC Cluster in 12 developing countries.

Within the PLEC network, the contribution from China Cluster has been particularly strong in the study of agrobiodiversity. China Cluster has developed methods for “agrobiodiversity assessment (ABA)” and subsequently “household – based agrobiodiversity assessment (HHABA)”. They are important parts of PLEC methods. It is our hope that the findings of China Cluster would be contributing to biodiversity management in agricultural areas in Yunnan, and other parts of China as this is the main purpose of the substantial support to PLEC work in Yunnan.

Sustainable biodiversity management in agricultural areas is critical to human survival, not only because there is far more biodiversity to be managed on and around the world’s farms than in the small areas that can be protected, but also because farming is the basic livelihoods of the most people in developing countries. The adoption of a work programme on agrobiodiversity by both the Conference of the Parties to Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in 2000 marked a watershed in promotion of biodiversity in agricultural systems. The CBD work programme calls for efforts be made to “identify management practices, technologies and policies that promote the positive and mitigate the negative impacts of agriculture on biodiversity, and enhance productivity and the capacity to sustain livelihoods, by expanding knowledge, understanding and awareness of the multiple goods and services provided by the different levels and functions of agricultural biodiversity.”

Building upon the success of the PLEC in the past and the increasing global focus on farm management of biodiversity, the future PLEC will continue to focus on the identification and promotion of biodiversity – friendly management techniques and systems, that are profitable, developed locally by people, who may be farmers, agroforesters, foresters, pastoralists, fishers and/or wildlife managers. The future PLEC will operate at a decentralized network of national and regional projects, and with their institutions. UNU will play its part to the best of its ability in supporting the coordination of the future PLEC.

This workshop will evaluate policy recommendations, based on substantive work of China Cluster and its partners in China. I also hope the workshop will also focus on how to continue the work in the future. I wish the workshop a very success, and I hope your stay is fruitful and enjoyable.

Thank you.